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AUTHOR Bischoff, Judith; Ellis, Joseph R.
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ABSTRACT

A study was conducted to determine the perceived difficulties first year physical education teachers encounter and how their perceptions compare to those of teachers in other curricular areas. A questionnaire, sent to 110 first year physical education teachers in Illinois, achieved a return rate of 30 percent. The questionnaire sought information on perceived difficulties unique to teaching physical education and difficulties associated with general teacher roles--planner, director of learning, counselor, interpreter of culture, link with community, and member of a profession and community. The highest degrees of difficulty appeared to be managing classes with large numbers and being flexible in using instructional facilities. The physical education teachers indicated a wide range of difficulty with the role of teacher as a link with the community. This was comparable to the role perceptions of teachers in other curricular areas. Recommendations for improving teacher education programs in these areas would involve simulation/experience in large group instruction, information on the role of the community and the schools, and experience with individuals of different cultural/ethnic backgrounds. Tables present statistical data gathered by the survey. (JD)

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Perceived Professional Difficulties Encountered By First Year Physical Education Teachers in Illinois Public Schools

By

Judith Bischoff
Assistant Professor
Department of Physical Education
Anderson Hall
Northern Illinois University
DeKalb, Illinois

and

Joseph R. Ellis
Professor
Educational Research Coordinator
College of Education
Northern Illinois University
DeKalb, Illinois

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Perceived Professional Difficulties Encountered By First Year Physical Education Teachers in Illinois Public Schools.

INTRODUCTION

Concern for the preparation and performance of public school teachers in America evolved with the development of the nation's common schools. Marsh and Wilder (9) reviewed studies of teacher effectiveness conducted between 1902-1952. Many of these studies sought to relate teacher performance with a variety of variables in the domain of the teacher's personal make-up, life experience, professional preparation and experience (Peterson, 10). Teachers, themselves, have reported that their primary source of knowledge about teaching is their personal experience. They acknowledge little influence from teacher education, other teachers, inservice education or school based supervision from principals or others (Howsam, 7). On the other hand, Ellis (3) and Gallemore (6) found that student teaching and early professional experience stand out as being very influential in the development of professionally competent, effective and satisfied teachers.

The evolution of the specific concerns for the professional difficulties of teachers is documented by Eddins' (2) "Why Teachers Fail"; Spears' (11) "What Disturbs The Beginning Teacher"; Wey's (12) "Why Do Beginning Teachers Fail"; Ellis' (3) relationships between teacher preparation and professional preference; Fuller's (5) concerns of teachers; Ellis and Radebaugh (4) a follow-up study of Northern Illinois University teacher education graduates; Coates and Thoresen (1) "Teacher Anxiety".

Both Fuller (5) and Coates and Thoresen (1) documented the self-reported anxieties and concerns of beginning teachers. Fuller's research dealt with new teachers in England. He found they were concerned about 1) class control, 2) their own content adequacy, 3) the situation in which they teach, and 4) evaluation by their supervisors and their pupils. Similarly, Coates and Thoresen (1) discovered the concerns of beginning teachers revolved around 1) their ability to maintain discipline in the classroom, 2) student's liking of them, 3) their knowledge of the subject matter, 4) what to do if they run out of material, and 5) how to relate personally to faculty, school system and parents.

While there are professional preparation concerns that are unique to each academic area, the above mentioned areas cut across many professional preparation disciplines. The purpose of this study was to 1) determine the perceived difficulties that first year physical education teachers encounter in performing their professional roles, and 2) compare the perceived difficulties in the general teacher roles of physical educators with other curricular area teachers.

Subjects. All first year physical education teachers in the State of Illinois were potential subjects. One hundred and ten were systematically selected out of 293 from an IBM printout provided by the Illinois State Board of Education Research and Statistics Section Manager. Filling out the questionnaire was voluntary, no names or school affiliations were required on the forms so anonymity was protected.

Procedure. The instrument for the study was developed based on a concept Kinney (8) developed into an instrument used by Ellis and Radebaugh which was then jury tested by educators in the field. Based upon the field recommendations the instrument was further refined by Ellis in 1979. The questions pertaining to physical education were developed from feedback of university supervisors and comments from student teachers. The physical education questions were then added to the refined instrument under the Area of Difficulties Unique to Your Teaching Assignment. (This study involved seven other researcher obtaining data from their particular curricular area which was used for the comparison data.)

The final instrument consisted of four areas: I. Reference Data, II. Difficulties Unique to Your Teaching Assignment in Physical Education, e.g. 1) working in a "mainstreamed" situation, 2) organizing and planning activities for a coed physical education situation, 3) planning for alternative and nontraditional instruction, 4) being flexible in using instructional facilities, and 5) managing classes with large numbers of students, III. Difficulties Associated With Seven General Teacher Professional Roles:

1. The Teacher As Planner. Teachers identify and assess the needs and problems of both students and society. They identify, assess and state clearly defensible instructional objectives. They plan and develop appropriate learning materials and activities. They assess and evaluate performance. They communicate and report the progress and needs of students.

2. The Teacher As Director and Helper of Learning. Teachers work to help students learn. They plan, make decisions, and take actions. They constantly and reflectively evaluate each activity and occurrence. Their actions involve getting ready for learning, interacting with the students and assessing both students and society.

3. The Teacher As Counselor and Guide To The Student. Throughout the entire mediating or teaching process, teachers also give behavioral evidence that they believe in the students' potential as persons. Teachers work with students who have unique needs and problems which include a personal, social, emotional, moral, physical, and intellectual nature. Teachers demonstrate an awareness of the complexity of the individuality in their totality.

4. The Teacher As Mediator and Interpretor Of The Culture. Teachers and students belong to a specific culture which necessitates conscious awareness and critical examination. Teachers are responsible in an unique way to communicate clearly and reflectively the culture.

5. The Teacher As A Link With The Community. Teachers and students are a part of a cultural setting and both are involved in the culture through community needs, happenings, interpretations, and customs. The very service and art of teaching necessarily link teachers to the community and the community to the teachers. Teachers help translate community values, needs and goals into school programs and communicate school programs to the community.

6. The Teacher As A Member Of The Teaching Profession. As a member of the teaching profession, teachers advocate and practice professional

automony including the freedom to teach and to learn. They accept responsibility for their professional judgments, acts and conduct. They continue their professional growth and contribute to the further development of the profession.

7. The Teacher As A Member Of The School Community. As a member of the school community teachers relate to and share experiences with students, administrators, supervisors, other teachers, and support personnel. They share in the general duties and responsibilities of the school and participate in efforts to improve the quality of programs and life in the school.

and IV. Ranking and Rating of Role Performance Difficulties.

RESULTS

A thirty percent return was realized. Of the respondents, 66.7% were females and 33.3% were male and all were teaching in their area of certification with 53.6% teaching at the senior high level. None of the respondents were teaching in urban areas (50,000+), 59.4% were in rural small towns with 40.6% in suburbia.

For first year physical education teachers, the highest degrees of difficulty appeared to be 1) managing classes with large numbers, and 2) being flexible in using instructional facilities (see Table 1). Some

Insert Table 1

of the comments accompanying the ranking were: . . . "50-70 students per class make it difficult to interact with students. . . " " . . . job requires that I teach over 600 students on a daily basis . . . "

" . . . my area is limited for instruction and playing. I have to share one gym with another class - a total of 70 students in a small (one

basketball court) space. I'm not always as flexible as I need to be." "Biggest (difficulty) I have had over the year is in the planning for use of the facilities (small town)."

In area III of Difficulties Associated with Seven General Teacher Professional Roles, first year physical education teachers indicated a wide range of difficulty with the role of teacher as a link with the community (see Table II). The role of teacher as a mediator and inter-

Insert Table II

pretor of the culture showed 60% of the respondents having moderate or considerable difficulty in the area.

In comparing the professional role performance difficulties of first year teachers from eight curricular areas, six of the eight areas ranked the teacher as a link with community as a one or two (one indicating the most difficult). The two exceptions were the curricular areas of Social Studies and English (See Table III). In the teacher role of mediator and interpretor of the culture, seven of the eight curricular

Insert Table III

areas ranked this role as a one or two - the exception was the curriculum area of Art.

The responses of the first year physical education teachers were comparable in Area III (ranking of the overall role performance difficulty within the seven areas) and Area IV (Ranking of each of the Roles) providing a within item comparison validity for the instrument.

DISCUSSION

Since the return of the questionnaire was low, it is difficult to make generalizations about the results. However, comparisons and

recommendations can still be noted in the discussion.

The perceived difficulties of the first year physical educator appear to be different than those found by Coates and Thoresen (1) and Fuller (5). However, one area that appears to still be a concern is "the situation in which they teach." The situation, for a physical educator is usually the largest, open, indoor space into which administrators schedule classes with large numbers of students.

In comparing the professional role performance difficulties of physical educators with teachers in other curricular areas, their difficulties are comparable. The particular difficulty of "teacher as a link with the community" was one mentioned in previous studies. Ascertaining one's role in a community as well as learning the cultural/ethnic components may be typical difficulties of first year teachers. This could be especially true if the first year teacher locates in an area different from her/his background.

Given that these current problems of the first year physical education teachers exist, there may be some avenues in professional preparation that would assist future beginning teachers. Some recommendations might be:

1. The simulation and/or actual experience of managing and/or instructing a large number of students (greater than 40) in small spaces. An inclusion of a variety of activities with the same number of students in small spaces. Videotaping the sessions might be appropriate so the students could receive immediate feedback about the lesson with a follow-up discussion and evaluation with the instructor.

2. The inclusion of information pertinent to the role of the community and the schools. The use of community resources and how to incorporate these resources for the benefit of school programs.

a. use of "Y" or recreation center swimming pools, outdoor spaces and other appropriate activity spaces.

b. community person to conduct seminars pertaining to different activities: bike repair, cross-country skiing, martial arts, etc.

3. Clinical experiences, independent studies, and/or field experiences in the freshman, sophomore, or junior years working with individuals of different cultural and/or ethnic backgrounds. These experiences could take place in nonschool settings and also accomplished in the summer months.

The first year teacher experiences numerous anxieties and frustrations. As many strategies as institutions can equip the student with for dealing with known problem areas can only lead to the better change of a successful year for the beginning teacher. Additional data needs to be collected from first year teachers in urban areas to see if they are experiencing the same problems as first year teachers in rural small towns and suburbia.

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TABLE I

First Year Illinois Public School Physical Education Teachers' Report of Difficulties in Performing Activities Unique to Their Teaching

Teaching Activities	Degree of Difficulty Reported							
	Little or None		Moderate		Considerable		Extreme	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Working in a "mainstreamed" situation	21	65.6	10	31.3	1	3.1		
Organizing and planning activities for a coed physical education situation	15	46.9	13	40.6	4	12.5		
Planning for alternative and nontraditional instruction	16	50.0	13	40.6	2	6.3	1	3.1
Being flexible in using instructional facilities	17	54.8	10	32.3	2	6.5	2	6.5
Managing classes with large numbers of students	11	35.5	12	38.7	6	19.4	2	6.5

N=32

TABLE II

First Year Illinois Public School Physical Education Teachers' Ratings of Their Professional Role Performance Difficulties

Teacher Professional Roles	Role Performance Difficulty Rating							
	Little or None		Moderate		Considerable		Extreme	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
The teacher as planner	14	45.2	16	51.6	1	3.2		
The teacher as director and helper of learning.	19	59.4	13	40.6				
The teacher as counselor and guide to the student	20	64.5	10	32.3	1	3.2		
The teacher as a mediator and interpretor of the culture	12	40.0	16	53.3	2	6.7		
The teacher as a link with the community	7	23.3	18	60.0	4	13.3	1	3.3
The teacher as a member of the teaching profession	19	63.3	7	23.3	4	13.3		
The teacher as a member of the school community	24	75.0	5	15.6	3	9.4		

N=32

TABLE III

Professional Role Performance Difficulties as Ranked By First Year Illinois Public School Teachers From Eight Curricular Areas

Teacher Roles	Rank in Order of Role Performance Difficulty As Ranked By:							
	Phys. Ed. (N = 32)	Home Ec. (N = 38)	Art (N = 34)	Soc. Stu. (N = 13)	Math (N = 31)	Science (N = 47)	Sp. Ed. (N = 150)	English (N = 49)
	Rank	Rank	Rank	Rank	Rank	Rank	Rank	Rank
The teacher as planner	4	4	6	3	5	3	4	4
The teacher as director and helper of learning	5	5	4	1	4	4	6	2
The teacher as counselor and guide to the student	3	3	2	5	3	5	3	5
The teacher as a mediator and interpretor of the culture	2	1	3	2	2	2	1	1
The teacher as a link with the community	1	2	1	4	1	1	2	3
The teacher as a member of the teaching profession	6	7	7	6	7	7	7	6
The teacher as a member of the school community	7	6	5	7	6	6	5	7